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15 December 1964

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

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CONTENTS

1. Israel: Prime Minister Eshkol's resignation a tactical move brought on by split within Mapai party. (Page 1)

25X1

3. Syria: Military regime showing signs of splintering. (Page 3)

25X1

5. Italy: Bitter and divisive contest in prospect over presidential balloting. (Page 5)

6. UN-USSR: Thant believes further postponement of normal General Assembly proceedings may be necessary. (Page 6)

7. Notes:

25X1

25X1

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15 December 1964

DAILY BRIEF

*Israel: Prime Minister Eshkol's resignation yesterday almost certainly is a tactical move precipitated by a split within his Mapai party.

The breach has been caused by former Prime Minister Ben-Gurion's determined opposition to certain of Eshkol's policies. The struggle is likely to continue until the party's convention in late January. Eshkol probably has the support to win a test of strength at that time, and in the meantime is expected to be asked to head a "caretaker" government.

Ben-Gurion's opposition centers around the "Lavon Affair," a controversial scandal which has divided the party since 1954. Lavon, who was defense minister at the time, was charged with responsibility for an abortive sabotage operation against US and UK installations in Egypt that was designed to embitter relations between Egypt and the West. Israeli agents assigned to carry it out were caught and exposed by Egypt.

A cabinet committee on which Eshkol served exonerated Lavon four years ago, despite Ben-Gurion's vehement objections. Ben-Gurion now claims he has new evidence and has demanded a reinvestigation of the affair. Eshkol resigned in order to bring the issue to a head.

An electoral alignment Eshkol has negotiated with another, smaller party--Achdut Haavoda--further antagonized Ben-Gurion because it involved a deal to "rehabilitate" Lavon as a member of Mapai.

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Syria: The delicately balanced Syrian military regime is showing signs of splintering.

Prime Minister Hafiz has held the military together for over a year by a series of compromises. However, the ouster from the army last week of Hafiz' former number-two man, Major General Mohammed Umran, may indicate that Hafiz' peace-making efforts are now meeting stiffer opposition from other regime members.

The Baathist regime has taken no steps to broaden its political base, but some effort is being made to alter its rigidly militaristic image. A recent general amnesty for political prisoners included even the pro-Nasir leaders of the abortive July 1963 revolt. Baathist civilians may soon be assigned a larger front role in the government.

These political moves are unlikely to be effective. The amnesty will probably spur increased antiregime plotting, and dissension over defining the future role of the civilians is likely only to aggravate the tensions within the military regime.

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Italy: A bitter and divisive contest is in prospect when the parliamentary electoral college convenes tomorrow to select a successor to President Segni.

Balloting may continue into next week as the center-left parties try to agree on a candidate whose election will be the least disruptive to the coalition.

Christian Democratic contenders--ex-Premiers Fanfani and Leone and Minister Piccioni--appear to have the edge over Social Democratic chief Saragat and Acting President Merzagora.

Christian Democratic accord on an "official" party choice is not determinative, because party discipline will probably not prevail during the secret balloting. The other coalition parties reportedly will back Saragat, whose chances appear slim, on the first three ballots. In subsequent ballots, when only a majority is needed, one or more of them may shift their vote to the leading Christian Democratic candidate.

The US Embassy reports a great deal of pessimism that, whatever the outcome of the election, "the effect on the coalition will be negative." Nenni, for example, is very pessimistic about the impact of the election, and he does not exclude the possibility of a crisis within a month. The US Embassy comments that such pessimism is "probably premature" but concedes that election of such a controversial figure as Fanfani "might well make a government crisis inevitable."

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UN-USSR: [Secretary General Thant believes that lack of progress on the Soviet arrears problem may necessitate another postponement in normal General Assembly proceedings.]

[Thant is convinced the USSR is willing to make only a "token contribution" to a UN reserve fund. He believes it is now giving consideration to his original plan for a six-week adjournment after the Christmas recess in order to permit time for further negotiations.]

[Soviet UN Ambassador Federenko has insisted to Ambassador Stevenson that the USSR can make no voluntary contribution unless all claims against it are canceled and there are no further complaints about its "so-called arrears." Federenko would not say how much the USSR would be willing to contribute. He also indicated that the voluntary contribution scheme is acceptable only if the Assembly proceeds with its work on a normal basis.]

[Moscow probably feels confident it is in a strong negotiating position. The USSR appears to be counting on stringing out negotiations on its arrears until several other UN members, notably France, become subject to the Article 19 sanction on 1 January.]

[The present nonvoting arrangements meanwhile are raising some awkward problems. A resolution affirming the arrangements worked out last spring at the UN Conference on Trade and Development may soon come up. Any move to stall or suggest even minor changes in the resolution could provoke a vote and risk a showdown over Article 19. A vote may also be necessary to determine whether Jordan or Mali is to receive a seat in the Security Council.]

25X1

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